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SWIFT'S BIRTHDAYS: THE TRADITION OF BIRTHDAY POEMS IN SWIFT'S HONOUR

Moyra Haslett, Queen's University Belfast

“Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, ‘There is a man child conceived.’” Numerous biographies of Swift record his habit of reading this verse from the Book of Job on his birthday, and there is good textual evidence that he did so. In a letter in 1738, written just three days shy of his 71st birthday on 30 November, he notes how he “detest[s]” his birthday and so marks the morning of his birthday by reading the third chapter of Job.¹ The anecdote neatly confirms Swift’s tendency to gloominess and depression and thus sums up in succinct form the darkness of his final years as these biographies draw to a close. But the remark is a late one and ought not to be taken as entirely typical of how Swift might have celebrated his birthday.²

Indeed, there is a much more celebratory story to tell of Swift’s birthdays. Just three years earlier, Martha Whiteway wrote to the Dean, then in Cavan, of how his birthday had been celebrated in Dublin. Henry Land, the sexton of St Patrick’s Cathedral, had held a dinner in Swift’s honour in which the menu was “wild-duck, plover, turkey, and pullet; two bowls of punch, and three bottles of claret;” followed later by a supper which involved “an ocean of punch.”³ The commemoration of Swift’s birthday in his own lifetime was one marked by letters of congratulation, public festivities, newspaper tributes, poems, and presents. And what is remarkable about all of these – both writings and events – is how extraordinarily unprecedented they were in the early eighteenth century. This essay will consider some of the ways in which Swift’s friends and fellow-Dubliners celebrated his birthday, focusing particularly on the birthday poems which were addressed to Swift in his own lifetime. A brief examination of the

¹ Swift to Mrs Whiteway, 27 November 1738, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, IV, 547-48 and nn3,4.

² The context of the letter is important: Swift was sympathizing with Mrs Whiteway’s troubles (both she and two of her children had been ill); his own deafness and dizziness had become much more severe at this point; and Swift’s cousin, Deane Swift, who first printed the letter and noted this habit of reading the chapter, only knew Swift in his later years.

³ Mrs Whiteway to Swift, 2 December 1735, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, IV, 243. The supper was enjoyed at the home of the verger of St Patrick’s Cathedral, Roger Kendrick.

wider culture of birthday celebrations in the early eighteenth century supports the claim that the poems in particular are “extraordinarily unprecedented” and shows how they have much to tell us of poetic legacies, poetry as sociable exchange, and the early reception of Swift. This will involve a consideration of the birthday poems themselves and of alternate traditions for these verses: those of poems to potential patrons, particularly monarchs, and the new tradition of birthday verses for friends, exemplified in Swift’s birthday poems to the woman he called ‘Stella’.

Swift’s birthday appears to have been publicly celebrated every year in Dublin, at the very least from 1726 until 1744, the last November before his death. These celebrations were the outworkings of the fame Swift achieved as ‘the Drapier’ in his campaign against the imposition of Wood’s halfpence upon Ireland in 1724 and 1725.⁴ An example of these is the following notice from the *Dublin Journal* in 1739:

Yesterday being the Anniversary of the Birth of that Glorious Patriot, the Rev Dr SWIFT, Dean of St Patrick’s Dublin, he received the Compliments of his Friends at the Deanry House, who all congratulated with him upon that Occasion, and paid him several Compliments on this great and unparelled Love to his Country and the many Services he hath done it, as likewise for his great and extensive Charity to poor Tradesmen, and other Persons in Distress. There were several fine Poems written on the Occasion; 21 Guns fired in Honour of the Day; Bonfires and Illuminations in many Parts of the Town, and on the four Pinnacles of St Patrick’s

⁴ As with the birthday poems discussed below, the public celebration of Swift’s birthday is almost without precedent. While royal birthdays were publicly celebrated, I know of only one other non-royal whose birthday was celebrated annually. This is the Bristol merchant, MP, slave-trader and philanthropist, Edward Colston; see *The Loyalists: A Poem on the Meeting of the Loyal Society in Bristol, Nov. 2, 1712, on the anniversary birth-day of Edward Colston, Esq;* by Charles Sage (London: by H. Meere for Richard Standfast, 1713 [FOXON S7.5]), and Kenneth Morgan, “Colston, Edward (1636–1721),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5996>, accessed 5 June 2017]. After victory at Porto Bello (1739), the birthday of the naval officer Edward Vernon would also be publicly celebrated; see Richard Harding, “Vernon, Edward (1684–1757),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28237>, accessed 5 June 2017].

Church; Bells ringing all the day, and the Evening was concluded with the greatest Demonstrations of Joy, by all Persons who are true Lovers of this Kingdom.⁵

Newspaper reports such as this can be found between 1726 and 1741 and suggest an established tradition of public celebration, consisting of the ringing of bells, the firing of guns or cannons, the lighting of bonfires, fireworks and windows, toasts to the health of the Dean, visits by friends to the Deanery and the composition of poems.

The most consistent recorder of these events was the *Dublin Journal*, a paper published by George Faulkner, the same Faulkner who, by 1726, had already established a significant working relationship with Swift by publishing the collected edition of the Drapier's Letters in 1725 (TEERINK AND SCOUTEN 21). We might thus suspect that Faulkner had good reason to 'talk up' any celebrations of Swift's birthday.⁶ But other Dublin newspapers also noted these occasions, and these in turn were often picked up by the London press.⁷ Swift's birthday appears to have become a regular fixture in the civic life of Dublin.

For some considerable time in advance of these public celebrations, however, was the practice of writing birthday greetings in verse for Swift. By 1723, the custom of Swift's friends composing verses in his honour was already well established; Swift writes to his friend Charles Ford: "We had onely some little slight Verses on the Birth-day. Once a year is too much, and my Friends will wish me dead to save them Trouble."⁸ In fact, the earliest reference to birthday verses for Swift comes eleven years earlier: in the letters Swift wrote to Esther Johnson and Rebecca Dingley, commonly known as the *Journal to Stella*. In January 1712, Swift received a letter from the two ladies written on the occasion of his birthday the previous November. And Swift responded directly to it, in the conversational style of these letter-diaries:

Well; then come, let us see this letter; if I must answer it, I must. What's here now? Yes faith, I lamented my birth-day two days after, and that's all; and you rhyme, madam Ppt; were those verses made upon my birthday? Faith, when I read them, I had them running

⁵ *The Dublin Journal*, 27 November-1 December 1739.

⁶ See the poem published in *The Dublin Journal* (4 Feb 1735), "To the Author of the Dublin Journal," which begins: "Poor, honest George, SWIFT's Works to Print."

⁷ *The Dublin Intelligence* and *Pue's Occurrences*, for example.

⁸ Swift to Charles Ford, 19 January 1724, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 486-87.

in my head all the day, and said them over a thousand times; they drank your health in all their glasses, and wished, &c I could not get them out of my head.⁹

Esther Johnson's verses to Swift on what would have been his 44th birthday – 30 November 1711 – have not survived, and certainly many others too, by Esther Johnson and by others. Among these are verses by Elizabeth Sican, who sent six lines of poetry to Swift together with the gift of a sturgeon on one of his birthdays in the mid-1720s.¹⁰

However, the bibliography of surviving birthday poems addressed to Swift remains an impressive one (see Appendix). This shows that at least 27 self-styled birthday poems have survived.¹¹ In addition to the manuscript poems which are missing from this list – such as the poems by Esther Johnson and Elizabeth Sican already mentioned – we have also almost certainly lost a number of printed verses, because many November / December issues of Dublin newspapers of the time have not survived. So the list remains a record only of those poems

⁹ Jonathan Swift, *Journal to Stella*, ed. Abigail Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 362-63 (8 January 1712). See also the birthday poem by Swift's friend, Thomas Parnell, which followed Stella's poem closely on its heels in 1713, "Dr. Parnell to Dr. Swift, on his Birthday, November 30th, 1713," *Collected Poems of Thomas Parnell*, eds Claude Rawson and F. P. Lock (Newark: University of Delaware Press, London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1989), pp. 320-22, 590-92, and the contextualized interpretation by Eberhard Griem, *Form und Funktion der englischen Geburtstagsdichtung im Klassizismus* (Regensburg: Hans Carl, 1971), pp. 97-98.

¹⁰ We know of Sican's gift because Swift referred to it "several years" later in a letter to Pope; see Swift to Pope, 6 February 1730, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, III, 279. Other texts which have not survived include those referred to by Ford in his letter of January 1724; Sheridan refers to an "Anglo-latin letter" which he prepared for Swift's birthday in 1736 (Sheridan to Martha Whiteway, 21 November 1736, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, IV, 363-64).

¹¹ Many of the details concerning dates and first printing are given according to the best current thinking, drawing here upon the work of modern editors of Sheridan, Delany, and Pilkington, as well as those scholars who have worked on manuscript versions of poems by Swift's circle. Sometimes biographical details are used to date poems: for example, John Sican's poem refers to Swift's deafness and is thus confidently assigned by Woolley to 1734 (the same year as its first printing).

which have survived, giving us a glimpse of what was undoubtedly an even larger body of poetry-writing.¹²

Together these poems give a very good indication of the diverse kinds of poetry circulation at this time: some circulated in manuscript while one (Charles Ford's Latin poem) survives in only one transcript, some are printed as cheap broadsides, three were published together in a handsome quarto edition by Faulkner (1733).¹³ By far the greatest number were first printed in Faulkner's *Dublin Journal* in late November and December of each year. And a few of the poems are either first printed, or quickly reprinted, in London papers such as *The London Magazine* or *The Gentleman's Magazine*.¹⁴

The poems represent something of a roll call of Swift's closest friends in Ireland: Thomas Parnell, Thomas Sheridan, Esther Johnson, Patrick Delany, Charles Ford, and among later friends and acquaintances, Laetitia Pilkington, Mary Barber, her son, Dr John Sican, the Earl of Orrery, Deane Swift, and William Dunkin. Indeed, a number of these friends used their

¹² I have not included here poems published in the papers on, or shortly after, his birthday date, but which do not otherwise announce themselves as being 'birthday poems.' These might be seen to belong to the wider traditions of verse in tribute to Swift, published throughout the year.

¹³ Charles Ford's Latin verses of 1727 exist only in a rough draft, until publication in the early twentieth century; see *The Letters of Jonathan Swift to Charles Ford*, ed. David Nichol Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), pp. xx, 214-15.

¹⁴ The bibliography gives only known first publication, not reprintings of poems. London printings and reprintings include: John Sican, "Verses Sent to the Dean on his Birth-Day," published in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (December 1734); John Boyle, fifth Earl of Orrery, "To the Reverend Doctor Swift," and Patrick Delany, "Verses Left with a Silver Standish," both reprinted in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (January 1733); Thomas Sheridan, "To the Rev Doctor Swift, Dean of St Patrick's: A Birthday Poem," published in *The Dublin Journal* (30 November 1736), reprinted in *The London Magazine* (December 1736). Sheridan appears to refer to broadsheet or newspaper publication when he closes this birthday poem with a dream in which he encounters his poem "in the street."

In terms of manuscript circulation, A.°C. Elias, Jr notes that Laetitia Pilkington's first birthday poem can be found in an Irish poetical miscellany dating to the 1730s, suggesting that it circulated in manuscript before its publication in her *Memoirs* (*Memoirs of Laetitia Pilkington*, ed. A.°C. Elias, Jr, 2 vols (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1997), II, 390. The same miscellany also includes a copy of her 'quill' birthday poem.

birthday poems as introductions to Swift or, at least, claimed to have written their birthday poems shortly after their first meetings with him.¹⁵

As a group, the poems are diverse in both literary form and content. Several are written broadly as kinds of irregular Pindaric odes in the style of public panegyric; others use Swift's comic iambic tetrameters to tease and joke informally with him; several attack the Walpole administration (although one anomalous poem oddly commends Walpole). Swift most often appears as the Drapier, either explicitly named or inferred as such in references to his preserving the liberty of Ireland. But the Dean is also praised as a writer, specifically, often, as a poet himself. Many are entirely celebratory, focusing exclusively on merry-making, festivities, wishing Swift a long life and happiness, and hoping for a good party. Others broach darker questions of Swift's mortality, though they do so through confident acclamations of the persistence of his fame and reputation. Many salute him as a specifically Irish hero; many others write of how he belongs to the whole world, not just to Ireland.

To give a sense of these poems I will briefly summarize two before moving on. My first example is a broadsheet poem from 1726: *A Poem on the Dean of St. Patrick's Birth-Day, Nov. 30th, Being St. Andrew's Day* ([Dublin]: J. Gowan, 1726 [Foxon P596]). Written in iambic tetrameter couplets, the poet dreams of a quarrel between St Andrew and St Patrick as to who might claim Swift as their own. St Patrick commends Swift's charity to the poor, his wisdom, and how he saved Ireland from her foes (evidently, here, William Wood and his halfpence, though the affair is not named as such) – in all of these ways, St Patrick argues, Swift, as Dean in the Church of Ireland, is his successor in residency and achievement. St Andrew, in addition to claiming Swift because of his birth-date (30 November being both St Andrew's Day and Swift's birthday), argues that Swift is “of the Scottish nation” by “transmigration” and compares his soul to that of James Graham, first Marquess of Montrose – the royalist army officer who was executed in Edinburgh in 1650. Both, he claims, are champions of liberty (Montrose by the sword, Swift by the pen) so that “He's now the same Montrose was then.” The argument is settled by an interposing angel before they descend to blows:

Now Words grew high, we can't suppose
Immortals ever come to blows,
But least unruly Passion shou'd,
Degrade them into Flesh and Blood,
An *Angel* quick from Heav'n descends

¹⁵ Either one is true of Patrick Delany, Laetitia Pilkington, Mary Barber, and the Earl of Orrery.

And he at once the Contest ends.
 “Ye rev’rend Pair from Discord cease,
 Ye both mistake the present Case.
 One *Kingdom* cannot have Pretence
 To So much Virtue! So much Sense!
 Search *Heaven’s* Record and there you’ll find,
That he was born for all Mankind.”¹⁶

Many broadsheet poems addressed to or concerning Swift were issued at the height of the Wood’s affair in 1724 and 1725. At least 24 broadsheet ballads, poems, and songs have survived, though many only in a single copy. Like the authors of the vast majority of those broadsides, the author here remains anonymous and was probably not in Swift’s circle.

My second example is one of five birthday poems in the bibliography by William Dunkin, “D[unki]n to S[wif]t.” The poem is printed in Dunkin’s posthumously published *Poetical Works* (1774). Since two other birthday poems by Dunkin were first published in *The Dublin Journal*, it may have had an earlier printing in an issue of the *Journal* which is now lost.¹⁷ However, the internal evidence of the poem itself suggests not, because it is particularly personal in nature. Beginning “MOST dear to thy D[UNKI]N, O S[WIF]T, ever dear,” the poem sends notice that Dunkin will attend Swift’s party, though feeling unwell, and notes that, even when well, he has often felt unable for the “costly fine dishes” and the “potent Margouze,” a particularly strong type of claret, which he would expect there. Dunkin asks Swift to “suspend” his “rigour” when judging of his compositions and not make him down whole

¹⁶ In a later poem by William Dunkin, St Andrew tells how, in order to mortify the pride of Scotland, Swift was given instead to the whole world: “Although Hibernia claims the gift, / It gave to human race a SWIFT”. See “On the Dean’s Birth-day, November 30, 1741,” first published in *The Dublin Journal* (5 December 1741); reprinted in *Poetical Works of the Late William Dunkin*, 2 vols (London: W. Nicoll and T. Becket, 1774), II, 366. John Winstanley’s birthday poem also invokes the figure of St Andrew; see *Poems Written Occasionally by John Winstanley* (Dublin: S. Powell, 1742), p. 67.

¹⁷ We can be reasonably confident of dating the poem to 1736 through the evidence of a letter from Dunkin to Martha Whiteway (30 November 1736, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, IV, 364-65). Only *Dublin Journal* 30 November 1736 survives (this includes a birthday poem by Sheridan), but not the December issues, which often included birthday poems also.

bumpers or drink strong wine. The poem ends with Dunkin inviting Swift to return to him the following evening for a fine “Attic repast,” well-seasoned with jests:

Though, even in health, your costly fine dishes,
 And ruddy-boon Bacchus were far from my wishes,
 Though my heart be now sick, quite addled my brains,
 And head split asunder with thought-gnawing pains,
 Yet I shall attend thee, when Hesperus bright
 Arises, fore-running the pale queen of night,
 And day-giving Phœbus to tipple his potion,
 Sinks into the chambers of broad-bosom'd Ocean. (II, 211-12)

Dunkin is known for his exuberant and experimental poetry, and that is certainly on show here. Poetry and feasting are intertwined: the “Attick repast” will be envied by Apollo, so presumably composing poetry is also to be a feature and Dunkin’s slow-sipping of wine is paralleled with his modest attempts to write poetry. The classical gods are invoked in comically burlesque style. The poem is also written in an unusual version of tetrameter – amphibrachic tetrameter – trisyllabic metre (‘dee-DUM-dee’) – which gives a light-hearted pulse to the poem.

Despite the variety of kinds and forms of poetry in the bibliography, a number of these poems display common features and speak to each other in ways which create an obvious tradition of annual birthday verses.¹⁸ Several compliment Swift by pointing out that Ireland now rivals Greece and Rome in fame: Ireland can claim her own immortal writer (comparable to Homer, Virgil, Cicero, Plutarch, Horace) or political hero (comparable to Cato and Brutus). Many depict the classical gods celebrating Swift’s birthday or choosing him as their favourite. And eight poems set the scene as an assembly of the gods, or of Christian saints.

In this regard, these poems immediately call to mind an alternative tradition of birthday poems, and one with a much longer history and more established practice: that of royal birthday odes. Begun in the Restoration period, the Court Ode – composed to celebrate the monarch’s birthday, to mark the New Year, or to welcome the return of the monarch from travel abroad –

¹⁸ See, for example, the way in which Barber’s poem, on sending her son (*Poems on Several Occasions* [London: C. Rivington, 1735], pp. 71-72), alludes to the previous year’s broadsheet poem (probably by Sheridan), in which a “young nobleman” delivers the poem. One of Laetitia Pilkington’s birthday poems ventriloquizes the voice of its accompanying gift, a quill. This conceit may have been inspired by the earlier broadsheet birthday poem of 1725, in which the Muses give the infant Swift gifts of quills from each of their wings, so as to endow his poetry with smoothness and sublimity.

became a standard feature of English court culture throughout the eighteenth century.¹⁹ Today, Purcell's settings of Odes for the birthday of Queen Mary, and Handel's one court Ode – *Eternal source of light divine* – written for the birthday of Queen Anne in 1713 (and which Swift may well have heard) continue to be performed, recorded, and enjoyed.²⁰

By far the greatest number of Court Odes, however, remain unknown. In her monograph on the Court Ode, Rosamond McGuinness notes that only a few of the odes between 1695 and 1735 have survived: "Unfortunately for our studies," she remarks, "(though not otherwise unfortunately for posterity, if the few extant odes are typical)." ²¹ McGuinness's sympathy lies clearly with the composers: "The ode composers often had to contend not merely with sycophantic gibberish but with texts which only the greatest ingenuity could make singable."²² Other modern critics have referred to the texts of the Odes as "masterpieces of grandiose pomposity" and as "inane and fulsome flatteries."²³ From about 1715 on, the Court Odes were an obligatory part of the positions of Poet Laureate and Master of the King's Music. In Swift's lifetime, Laurence Eusden (Poet Laureate from 1715 to 1730) and Colley Cibber (from 1730 on) were the writers of the texts of the official state Odes. Both poets increasingly became targets of satire, most famously in Pope's *Dunciad*, but also in countless parodies and

¹⁹ On the history of the English Court Ode, see Rosamond McGuinness, *English Court Odes, 1660-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

²⁰ Swift may well have heard the first performance of Handel's Ode; see his entry in the *Journal to Stella* for 6 February 1713: "This is the Qu—'s birth day, and I never saw it celebrated with so much Lurry. and fine Cloaths, I went to Court to see them" (p. 494). Ellen Harris and Donald Burrows both make a case for its 1713 performance. In Swift's satire on royal panegyrics, "Directions for a Birth-day Song" (1729), Handel is invoked as the 'go-to' composer for the hack, since "[He] artfully will pare and prune / Your words to some Italian Tune" (*Poems*, ed. Williams, II, 469, ll. 277-78).

²¹ McGuinness, *English Court Odes, 1660-1820*, p. 141.

²² McGuinness, *English Court Odes, 1660-1820*, p. 229.

²³ The first of these refers specifically to Eusden's odes and is from Peter F. Heaney, "The Laureate Dunces and the Death of the Panegyric," *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 5, no 1 (1999); the second refers specifically to Cibber's odes and is from Edmund Kemper Broadus, *The Laureateship: A Study of the Office of Poet Laureate in England with Some Account of the Poets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), p. 129.

burlesques which, from 1731 on, even appeared alongside Cibber's own odes in the London newspapers.²⁴

Among the satires written at this time was Swift's "Directions for a Birth-day Song," inscribed as being written on the birthday of George II: 30 October 1729. With this date in mind, Eusden is a particular target of Swift's poem, but beyond the Poet Laureate lie the many writers who sought political or financial favour by writing panegyrics. Swift's handy hints include the following: lots of classical gods, whose stories are easily apt to the modern period (Saturn devouring his children, Jove deposing Saturn or philandering in groves, for example); a comparison with Mars will allow for lots of blood-thirsty war-mongering and one can bring in trusty epithets that always work, such as thunder emanating from your hero's arms or lightning from his eyes; bringing in Phoebus Apollo is another good step – because the hero is often barely literate, so praising his wit and sense will go down well; indeed, you do best to praise your hero for the very qualities he does not possess; being irreligious is no bar to success (Caroline and the Maids of Honour have all been steeped in unorthodoxy under the influence of Samuel Clarke anyway), and the harsh guttural sounds of German names and places would be better replaced with more harmonious words – names of rivers like "Sabrina", the Latin form of Severn, for example, will do the trick (ll. 241-42). This poem of 282 lines contains many more such directions, which may all be summarized under the general tip that any money paid will probably bear an inverse proportion to the quality of the verse and the abilities and merit of the patron:

And when we starve for want of Corn,
Come out with Amalthea's Horn,
For Princes love you should descant
On Virtues which they know they want. (ll. 125-28)

²⁴ See McGuinness, *English Court Odes, 1660-1820*, p. 71. Colley Cibber's birthday ode of 1734 was particularly ridiculed because it was almost identical with that he had written just the year before. His New Year's Ode of 1733 was printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (January 1733), together with satirical annotations, reprinted from *The Grub-Street Journal*, and was then immediately followed with the printing of Orrery and Delany's linked poems for Swift's 1732 birthday (pp. 39-40).

Since the poem includes openly satirical attacks on George II and Queen Caroline, Frederick Prince of Wales and the seven-year-old Duke of Cumberland, it is unsurprising that it was never published in Swift's lifetime.²⁵

Although several late birthday poems to Swift openly satirize the tradition of royal birthday odes, the vast majority do not, and many of the birthday poems addressed to Swift invoke the gods in ways not entirely dissimilar to those used in the royal birthday odes.²⁶ That they do so is hardly surprising, given the prominence of the genre. In addition to the London festivities, the celebrations of royal birthdays in Dublin Castle were also conspicuous highpoints in the year, not only for the wealthy and well-to-do enjoying the entertainments in the Castle, but also for the Dublin citizens who could watch the bonfires, fireworks, and

²⁵ The poem survives in two manuscripts, one in the hand of Charles Ford, and was first published in *Works*, ed. Deane Swift (1765). See headnote in *Poems*, ed. Williams, II, 459-60. For another pointed attack on the celebration of royal birthdays, note the publication of Swift's *Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* (May 1720), which coincided with the celebration of George I's sixtieth birthday (*Prose Works*, IX, xv, 16-17).

²⁶ For satirical attacks on the royal birthday-ode tradition, see "Verses sent to the Rev. Dr Swift, D.S.P.D. on the Anniversary of his Birth, November 30, 1736, with one of Wood's Copper Half-pence, inclosed" (*The Gentleman's Magazine*, 6 [December 1736]), which opens with an attack on the corruption of the royal odes; Dunkin's "A Dialogue between Janus and Time, on the Dean's Birth-day" which writes of how monarchs are the vassals of Time, but Swift will triumph over time; Dunkin's poem beginning "Ere meek Aurora, rob'd in white," which argues that a true patriot is more rare and precious than kings. See also the opening of Robert Ashton's *Congratulatory Poem to the Reverend D[ea]n Swift* (Dublin, 1725): "Whilst others Write of Heroes and Renown / Such as with Lawrels grace the British Crown / Of Albion's glory and its antient Fame, / I raise my Thoughts, to such a nobler Theme, / And sound the Merits of a Reverend Dean" (Foxon A341). The poem does end, however, with praise of Queen Anne.

For some similarities between the Swift and royal birthday poems, see Sheridan's 1725 Swift birthday poem which concludes with praise of Lord Carteret (motivated, no doubt, by attempting to repair some of the damage done by his infamous 1 August sermon); and Sheridan's 1736 poem which attempts, and fails (though ultimately succeeds) in writing a "panegyric": "Yet after all I cannot find / One panegyric to my mind." Many of the poems also invoke the gods, or assembly of the gods, which is conventional in the birthday odes. See also the shoemaker Robert Ashton's broadside, *A Poem on the Birth Day of Her Late Majesty Queen Anne, of Ever Glorious Memory, Dedicated to the Reverend Dean Swift* (Dublin: C[ornelius] C[arter], 1726/7): "With joy great Swift, we view the breaking morn" (Foxon A346).

illuminations as well as listen to the bell-ringing and the firing of guns, and perhaps catch something of the odes in reports in the newspapers.²⁷ There was a Master of the State Music in Ireland who composed for Dublin Castle, and serenatas – a particular kind of musical ode – were commissioned by the Viceregal Court for royal birthdays.²⁸ While the composer thus remained the same and is always recorded on the printed libretti, the author of the royal birthday odes could and did change, unlike London, where the author was always, from 1715 on, the poet laureate. Although there would be suggestions in the 1740s that Ireland might have its own Poet Laureate, there was of course no such position.²⁹

But aspiring writers were encouraged to write on such public occasions. Trinity College, for example, had an annual competition for the best royal birthday poems. In the 1732 competition, William Dunkin and John Sican, both authors of birthday poems to Swift, were successful in being awarded cash prizes.³⁰ And we know that Matthew Pilkington, Thomas Sheridan, and William Dunkin had written official birthday odes performed at Dublin Castle in 1728, 1729, 1730, 1734, and 1736, and that Swift had worked with Pilkington on significant changes made to the first of these (an involvement which led to his writing the “Directions”).³¹

²⁷ See, for example, *Dublin Gazette*, 6-9 February 1714. Although the Lord Lieutenant was in residence only every two years, the celebrations were hosted by the Lords Justices in his absence.

²⁸ Successive Masters of the State Music in Ireland in Swift’s lifetime were Viner, Cousser, Dubourg. While Cousser was in Ireland, he composed one ode and more than twenty serenatas, the majority for royal birthdays. On the Dublin tradition of royal odes and serenatas, see Samantha Owens, “Johann Sigismund Cousser, William III and the Serenata in Early Eighteenth-Century Dublin,” *Eighteenth-Century Music*, 6 (2009), 7-40.

²⁹ John Winstanley paired Matthew Pilkington with Colley Cibber as writers of royal birthday odes; see *Poems Written Occasionally by John Winstanley*, p. 72. In 1746, Benjamin Victor, who had written the text of the royal Dublin birthday ode in 1735, was hopeful that Chesterfield, as Lord Lieutenant, might create the post of Irish poet laureate (see *Memoirs of Laetitia Pilkington*, ed. Elias, II, 528). Elias notes that Victor was undeterred by the Irish origins of Dryden’s satirical poet laureate MacFlecknoe.

³⁰ See *The Dublin Journal* (7-11 March 1732); *Pue’s Occurrences* (7-11 March 1732); and the broadsheet, *To the College Poets who are Encourag’d to Write on His Majesty’s Birth-Day* [Dublin [1727]] (FOXON T363).

³¹ Matthew Pilkington was the author of Dublin birthday odes in 1728 and 1734; Thomas Sheridan in 1729 and 1730; and William Dunkin in 1734. For details concerning Matthew Pilkington’s authorship of Court birthday odes, see *Memoirs of Laetitia Pilkington*, ed. Elias, II, 389-90 and 450-51.

Pope attacked Grub Street authors who made poetry synonymous with sycophancy. For Swift, however, such poets could be found among his Dublin circle, with many friends writing encomiastic verses addressed not only to the rich and powerful, but also to himself.³²

At this point, we find Swift in the position of having satirized panegyric verses but also of being himself the subject of panegyric verse.³³ Several of the anonymously published poems in the *Dublin Journal* are rather too close to the royal birthday poems for possible comfort. Principally here, there is the 1740 “Ode to the Patron of Liberty.” The poem was certainly written by someone who knew little of Swift’s general opposition to war. Published during the war against Spain known as the War of Jenkins’s Ear, the poem is similar in spirit to Arne’s “Rule Britannia,” first performed in 1740 also, and speaks patriotic sentiments which are not dissimilar in its rousing invocation of victory. The poem’s third stanza might be taken as typical:

With what Raptures the Brave are inspir’d,
How the Heart of a Soldier is fir’d,

For example, the official Ode performed at Dublin Castle on the occasion of King George II’s birthday in 1734 was written by him (“Great, inexhausted Source of Day”). The poem had originally been composed in 1728, set to music by Dubourgh and revised (possibly with Swift’s help) for the King’s birthday in 1729. On the changes made to the 1728 version, which are directly pertinent to Swift’s “Directions for a Birth-day Song,” see *Memoirs*, ed. Elias, II, 389-90. In *The History of the Second Solomon* (1729), Swift noted that no one knew that Sheridan was the author of the 1729 ode; see *The Poems of Thomas Sheridan*, ed. Robert Hogan (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994), p. 355.

³² In *A Poem Delivered to the Reverend Doctor Swift, Dean of St. Patrick’s, Dublin, by a Young Nobleman, November 30, 1725, Being the Dean’s Birthday* (Dublin, 1725) – possibly by Thomas Sheridan – the two are conflated when the poem ends with a fulsome compliment to the Lord Lieutenant Carteret; see *The Poems of Thomas Sheridan*, ed. Hogan, pp. 157-59, 340-41.

³³ We might note here Swift’s own excursions into panegyric verse in his early career as a poet, including his first publication, the *Ode to the King: on his Irish Expedition* (Dublin, 1691; *Poems*, ed. Williams, I, 4-10). See Ann Cline Kelly’s suggestion throughout *Jonathan Swift and Popular Culture: Myth, Media, and the Man* ([New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002], pp. 13, 45-46, and *passim*), that Swift harboured an ambition for laureateship, in addition to the accepted view that he desired the position of Historiographer Royal. Compare, however, Ashley Marshall’s argument that the picture of Swift which emerges from Faulkner’s 1735 *Works* was one without laureate pretension to be a ‘great writer’ (“The ‘1735’ Faulkner Edition of Swift’s *Works*,” *The Library*, 7th ser., 14 [2013], 154-86), although that is the accolade that the birthday poems repeatedly bestow upon him.

When our Banners display'd
 Cast a terrible Shade,
 As we march o'er the Plain
 To be Victors of Spain!
 When the Genius of England cries War, War, War,
 When the Genius of England cries War.

The jingoistic style of this poem would have found no favour with Swift, although, by 1740, his health was fading so fast that he is unlikely to have paid it much attention.

The vast majority of the birthday poems, however, do not partake of the fulsome obsequies typical of the royal birthday poems.³⁴ If the gods are invoked, it is usually in comic burlesque style. And even when the poems are particularly effusive in their flattery, that tone is not lofty and elevated as in the tradition of formal odes, and any tendencies to such are usually checked by tetrameter lines (14 of 25 birthday poems in English are in tetrameter). Tetrameter is not inherently comic, but these shorter lines, with their “touch-and-go” rhymes and “sprightly running,” are inimical to the pomposity and grandiosity which mar so many of the royal birthday odes.³⁵ And they immediately call to mind the poetry of Swift himself and particularly his series of birthday poems to Esther Johnson (seven poems, written between 1719 and 1727), themselves all written in iambic tetrameters in complex mixtures of tones – by turns tender and satirical, sombre and facetious.³⁶

³⁴ It must be noted here, however, that more popular forms of address on royal birthdays also began to be published; see, for example, the following broadsheet *Poem on the Birth-Day of His Most Sacred Majesty King George* (Dublin: Thomas Hume, 1725) (“Hail happy day! on which pleas'd heaven doth smile” [Foxon P591]). See also the anti-Jacobite broadsheet: *A New Poem, [i]n Commemoration of the 10th of June, Being the Birth-Day of the Chevalier d'St. George* [Dublin, 1726] (“Ye furies dire who tread the Stygian sand” [Foxon N167]). Later popular song collections began to print the texts of royal birthday odes: see, for example, *The Ever-Green* (Dublin: James Hoey, [1768?]), pp. 222-225.

³⁵ Margaret Anne Doody, “Swift among the Women,” *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 18 (1988), 68-92 (p. 79).

³⁶ See, among others, Ronald Paulson, “Swift, Stella, and Permanence,” *ELH*, 27 (1960), 298-314; Charles Peake, “Swift's Birthday Verses to Stella,” *Proceedings of The First Münster Symposium on Jonathan Swift*, eds Hermann J. Real and Heinz J. Vienken (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1985), pp. 175-86; and Ros Ballaster, “Jonathan Swift, the *Stella* poems,” *A Companion to Eighteenth Century Poetry*, ed. Christine Gerrard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 170-83.

A number of the birthday poems addressed to Swift openly allude to the verses to Stella and clearly take them as their model.³⁷ We might expect these poems to be familiar to many of Swift's earliest Dublin friends (Thomas Sheridan, Patrick Delany, Esther Johnson herself), but beyond the circle of his friends who met between 1719 and 1727 were the readers who encountered many of the poems in the Pope-Swift *Miscellanies: The Last Volume* of 1728, either in its London edition or its Dublin reprint (TEERINK AND SCOUTEN 25 and 33).³⁸ Although the flourishing of birthday poems to Swift is inspired by a number of different, coalescing factors – the outpouring of ballads, poems, songs and pamphlets in response to the Drapier's affair, including early calls that a public monument or statue should be raised in his honour; the public celebrations of Swift's birthday in Dublin and the newspaper reporting of those celebrations, and Faulkner's own encouragement of the practice – the publication of the Stella birthday poems are clearly an important part of this, too.³⁹

³⁷ Esther Johnson's poem centres on the same theme as many of the Swift poems to Stella: the greater value of virtue and wit over mere appearance; Thomas Sheridan's 1725 poem has the goddess Venus give the infant Swift the gift of desiring only the beauty of the mind; Orrery's poem uses the metaphor of female beauty and virtue to describe the transformation Swift's writing will make to the copybook he is presenting; Thomas Sheridan's 1736 poem describing the trials of writer's block (biting nails and scratching head) is similar to Swift's birthday poem to Stella of 1723. The same poem also announces his intention to write a birthday poem to Swift each year; his birthday poem of 1737 explicitly refers to the Stella birthday poems (ll. 47-48).

³⁸ Five of the seven poems were first published in the London *Miscellanies*, and reprinted in Samuel Fairbrother's Dublin edition of the *Miscellanies* of the same year.

³⁹ *A Letter from Aminadab Firebrass, Quaker Merchant, to M.^oB. Drapier* (Dublin: John Harding, [1724]) and *An Excellent New Ballad against Wood's Half-Pence* (Dublin: John Harding, 1724) both proposed that a statue to the Drapier be raised; and William Dunkin, in a poem addressed to Swift in 1736, called upon the poor to give up their kettles as a financial contribution towards a statue of Swift (William Dunkin, *A Curry-Comb of Truth for a Certain Dean: or, the Grub-Street Tribunal* [Dublin, 1736], p. 5 [FOXON D516]). One of Dunkin's birthday poems also envisages the monument which might be designed to celebrate Swift: "Anniversary Verses on the Dean's Birth-Day," *Poetical Works*, II, 357-62 ("ON thee the giver of this verse should wait"). Faulkner's call for funds towards a public monument would come later, in the *Dublin Journal* in the months after Swift's death. See Robert Mahony, *Jonathan Swift: The Irish Identity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 11.

We need to remember at this point just how unprecedented this flourishing of informal birthday poems was in Dublin in the 1720s and 1730s. Indeed, it constitutes an entirely new tradition in English verse – of informal, occasional birthday verses addressed to one’s friends – which would go on to inspire many later birthday poems and which would be particularly popular with women writers in the eighteenth century.⁴⁰ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the practice of giving books or specially written poems as gifts on New Year’s Day was common, particularly among elite families. But birthdays were often unremarked. Both John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys usually noted their birthdays in their diaries, it is true, but they did not do so consistently, and the day itself was treated like any other, except perhaps for a brief appeal in the diary to God’s continued blessings for the ensuing year.⁴¹ Birthday poems in English were entirely addressed to royalty with only a few exceptions addressed to potential aristocratic patrons.⁴² Recent work on manuscript verse, and particularly on poetry by

⁴⁰ For examples of later birthday poems, see Mary Masters, *Poems on several occasions* (London, 1733); Jane Brereton, *Poems on several occasions* (London, 1744); Margaret Goddard, *Poems* (Dublin, 1748); Mary Jones, *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (Oxford, 1750); and Mary Leapor, *Poems upon Several Occasions* (London, 1751). Leapor’s poem “The Birth-Night” ends, in conscious homage to Swift’s Stella birthday poems, by commending the “Good-Nature” of its addressee (pp. 272-76). Margaret Doody sees Swift’s Stella birthday poems as directly invoked in Mary Jones’s poems (“Swift among the Women,” pp. 83-84).

⁴¹ John Evelyn omits any reference to his birthday (31 October) in diaries entries for that day in 1675, 1685, and 1693; Pepys did not remark upon his birthday (23 February) in his 1668 diary.

⁴² See, for example, Ben Jonson, “To Sir William Sidney, On His Birthday” and “On Lord Bacon’s Birthday” (*The Poems*, eds C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954], pp. 120-21, 225); Elkanah Settle, *Spes Hunsdoniana: A Poem on the Anniversary Birth-Day of the Incomparable Youth, Mr. Matthew Bluck, Son and Heir to the Worshipful Matthew Bluck, Esq; of Hunsdon-House, Hartfordshire* (London: A. Baldwin, 1702 [Foxon S294]); Anne Finch, “A Poem for the Birth-Day of the Right Hon^{ble} the Lady Catharine Tufton: Occasion’d by Sight of Some Verses upon that Subject for the Preceding Year, Compos’d by no Eminent Hand” (reprinted in *Selected Poems of Anne Finch*, ed. Katharine M. Rogers [New York: Frederick Ungar, 1979], pp. 69-71); *A Ballad on Lord Pelham’s Birth-Day, July 24 1714: To the Tune of, London is a Fine Town* (London, 1714 [Foxon B29]), on the coming of age of Thomas Pelham-Holles, subsequent Duke of Newcastle; and Francis Peck, “Verses Presented to the Right Honourable Elizabeth Cecil on her Birthday, 23 November 1717,” published in *Sighs upon the Never Enough Lamented Death of Queen Anne* (London: Henry Clemens, 1719 [Foxon P137]).

seventeenth-century women poets, has not altered this conclusion. Prior to Dublin in the 1720s and 1730s then, a tradition of birthday poems addressed neither to a royal nor to a potential patron cannot be said to exist, certainly in English. There had been the classical tradition of the *genethliacon*,⁴³ and there is some evidence of birthday poems exchanged between friends in late seventeenth-century Dutch women's writing, but there is no comparable tradition in English until this of the eighteenth century.⁴⁴ That in itself is a notable feature of the Dublin of Swift's years of fame.

Among the key birthday poems, a clear distinction can be drawn between those written by friends and those clearly less familiar with Swift, and, in a few cases, those completely unknown to him. A number of the verses from friends are marked by the addition of gifts: John Sican offers a particularly fine edition of Horace, engraved on copper-plate by John Pine and bound in red morocco leather; the three poems by the Earl of Orrery, Patrick Delany, and Laetitia Pilkington, which were printed in a quarto edition by Faulkner (TEERINK AND SCOUTEN 1307) were accompanied by gifts of a blank book in which Swift might write, a silver standish (a writing or ink stand), and a quill.⁴⁵ Other gifts included that of a sturgeon (Elizabeth Sican's

⁴³ For a brief definition, see George Puttenham, "The Arte of English Poesie," *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964 [1904]), II, 48, 52.

⁴⁴ See Edwin Haviland Miller, "New Year's Day Gift Books in the Sixteenth Century," *Studies in Bibliography*, 15 (1962), 233-41; Martine Van Elk, *Early Modern Women's Writing: Domesticity, Privacy and the Public Sphere in England and the Dutch Republic* (Palgrave, 2017). I am grateful to Marie-Louise Coolahan and Edel Lamb for drawing my attention to these sources. Other birthday poems exchanged within Swift's circle include Swift's birthday poems to Charles Ford and to Rebecca Dingley (see the bibliographical data in note 13; *Poems*, ed. Williams, II, 760-62), Charles Ford's Latin poem to Stella on her birthday (*The Letters of Jonathan Swift to Charles Ford*, ed. Nichol Smith, pp. 212-13); and Constantine Barber's poem to his mother, dated and referring explicitly to his seventeenth birthday (1731), "A Letter Sent to Mrs Barber, at Tunbridge-Wells," in Mary Barber, *Poems on Several Occasions*, pp. 253-56.

⁴⁵ Pine's edition of Horace was published in 1733 and 1737 (PASSMANN AND VIENKEN I, 907), so the gift was of the first volume. For a description of Orrery's gift-book, see David Woolley's note, *Correspondence*, III, 583n2: the blank paper-book contained "nearly two hundred leaves, and sumptuously bound in red morocco covered with floral designs and gilt panels, and fastened with silver clasps." Matthew Pilkington's poem "The Gift" (*Poems on Several Occassions* [London: T. Woodward,

gift); other poetry (Laetitia Pilkington sent her gifts of a quill and birthday poem wrapped with a cutting from a London paper of another published poem by her); a Wood's half-pence; and even an admiring fan (Mary Barber sent her son with her poem). Recalling Swift's birthdays, Patrick Delany later noted: "It was customary with SWIFT's friends to make him some little annual presents upon his birth-day: either verses, or (according to his own definition of a present) *some things of no great value, that could not be bought.*"⁴⁶ Swift's impulse was sometimes honoured in the breach – John Sican's gift of the morocco-bound Horace was the most ostentatiously expensive present – but Pilkington gave an eagle quill which was already in her possession. Recycling presents may now be considered a social faux pas, but Pilkington presented her quill with the gift of a poem, and it is of course the poems themselves which match Swift's definition of a present most precisely: a thing of "no great value, that could not be bought." The birthday poems to Swift thus range themselves against the traditions of royal birthday songs or panegyric verse more generally by being beyond the compulsions of a cash nexus or of reciprocal good. Perhaps these versifiers hoped for a mark of Swift's favour, a poem in return, or a connection with the famous man. A long tradition of twentieth-century philosophical thinking on the identity of the gift discusses it in terms of its intertwining of generosity and self-interestedness.⁴⁷ That poems to Swift were often offered relatively early in a friendship hints that the giver felt they had something 'to gain.' But beyond the motives of gift exchange is the survival of the poems themselves, which testify to a lively print culture of poetry-exchange, which does not have a parallel in London print culture at this time.

A number of critics have noted Swift's disappointment that Pope never addressed a verse epistle to him: one short verse paragraph added to *The Dunciad Variorum* had to suffice.⁴⁸

et al., 1731], pp. 74-76) and Dunkin's 1741 birthday poem ("The saints to testify their love") both have Swift as the gift given by the gods / Heaven to Ireland.

⁴⁶ Patrick Delany, *Observations upon Lord Orrery's Remarks on the Life and Writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift* (Dublin: W. Reeve and A. Linde, 1754], pp. 19-20.

⁴⁷ See the work of Marcel Mauss, George Bataille, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, and Pierre Bourdieu; and also *The Culture of the Gift in Eighteenth-Century England*, eds Linda Zionkowski and Cynthia Klekar (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁴⁸ *The Dunciad*, ed. James Sutherland, 3rd ed. (London: Methuen, and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 62-63 (I, ll. 17-26). On the delay in including the dedicatory lines, see Claude Rawson, *Swift and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 91. For Swift's

Thomas Sheridan's 1736 birthday poem to Swift describes the difficulty of the task: not even Pope or Gay, he says, has attempted such a venture. The risks of flattery had been demonstrated in Swift's poem "Libel on Dr Delany," in which Swift had praised Pope's principled challenge to political corruption, much to Pope's dismay. For Swift's praise of Pope as an opposition poet came at the very moment when Pope was "to some extent" courting the Whigs.⁴⁹ Pope wrote to Swift: "Sure you wou'd not use me so ill as to flatter me?" while he wrote to another friend [William Fortescue], that Swift had "done more by praising me than all the Libels could by abusing me ... indeed one indiscreet Friend can at any time hurt a man more than a hundred silly Enemies."⁵⁰

Of all the birthday poems, the most frequently reprinted in the eighteenth century were those by Orrery and Delany, which had first been published in the *Dublin Evening Post* and in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of January 1733. Usually, they were published with a verse reply by Swift, in which he wrote of his hope that these poems might survive to monumentalize their friendship:

Let both around my tomb be plac'd
As trophies of a muse deceas'd,
And let the friendly lines they writ
In praise of long departed wit,
Be grav'd on either side in columns,
More to my fame than all my volumes.

Swift was of course being polite in writing that he was more proud of these testimonies of their friendship than of his complete works. Even then, Swift knew that his works would long outlast the poems these friends had offered.

disappointment that Pope did not address a verse epistle to him, see Dustin Griffin, *Swift and Pope: Satirists in Dialogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 140-41.

⁴⁹ See Phillip Harth, "Friendship and Politics: Swift's Relations with Pope in the Early 1730s," *Reading Swift: Papers from The Third Münster Symposium on Jonathan Swift*, eds Hermann J. Real and Helgard Stöver-Leidig (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1998), pp. 239-48; Eugene Hammond, *Jonathan Swift: Our Dean* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2016), p. 523.

⁵⁰ Pope to Swift, 4 March 1730, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, III, 288; Pope to William Fortescue, February 1730, *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), III, 91.

The lines also recall the birthday poems to Stella, the last written in the shadow of her death. There is a particular poignancy in the fact that Swift's poems on Stella's birthday, in which advancing age and mortality were prominent themes, would ultimately be published as a form of memorial to her, published just five days before what would have been her 47th birthday, and would make Stella widely known beyond the circles of Swift's friends. Swift, in contrast, did not need the birthday poems addressed to him to make him famous, or indeed to keep him famous.

The poems written to celebrate Swift's birthday add further evidence to the claim of his extraordinary fame in Dublin from the Drapier's affair onwards. As such, they corroborate the arguments of Ann Cline Kelly in *Jonathan Swift and Popular Culture*.⁵¹ At the same time, they illustrate the limitations of Swift's management of his own image. The poems also contribute to the view of Swift as manuscript poet: so many of these poems contribute to that culture of scribal exchange of poetry among Swift's circle. We had better remember here that Swift wrote either "solely" or "at least primarily" for a very limited audience.⁵² That phrase "at least primarily" seems particularly appropriate for the birthday poems. We know from Swift's response to Pilkington that he desired her poem to be published, although he would not be seen to be the one to authorize the publishing. In a letter thanking Laetitia for her birthday gifts, Swift notes that he has "ventured to communicate" the verses to "some particular Friends of Genius and Taste," and adds: "But as I cannot with Decency shew them except to a very few, I hope, for both our Sakes, others will do it for me."⁵³

⁵¹ Kelly, *Jonathan Swift and Popular Culture*, pp. 77-104.

⁵² Stephen Karian, "Swift as a Manuscript Poet," *Jonathan Swift and the Eighteenth-Century Book*, eds Paddy Bullard and James McLaverty (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 36.

⁵³ Swift to Laetitia Pilkington, 1 January 1733, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, III, 571. These poems would be printed first in the *Dublin Evening Post* and the *Gentleman's Magazine*, then in a special collection edition by Faulkner, and in Swift's *Works* of 1735 and multiple printings thereafter; however, Laetitia Pilkington's own poem would disappear from these reprintings. See also Swift to Lord Orrery, 25 January 1732/3, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, III, 582-83: ("Although I had not the least hand in publishing those verses [which would have ill become me], yet I shall not be so [as] affected to conceal the pride I have in seeing them abroad"); and Patrick Delany: "I verily think, there are few things, [Swift] ever wrote, that he did not wish to be published, at some time or other" (*A Letter to Dean(e) Swift, Esq; on his Essay upon the Life, Writings, and Character of Dr J. Swift* [London: W. Reeve and A. Linde, 1755], pp. 16-17).

The verses to Swift by his friends were clearly intended to be read aloud to him on the occasion of his birthday.⁵⁴ The question remains to what extent they remain ‘private’ poems notwithstanding their public printing. Many of the poems rely upon a sense of the ‘in-joke’ which requires readers both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of their domain.⁵⁵ Our oppositional categories of ‘manuscript’ and ‘print’ certainly cannot do full justice to the ways in which, say, an often primarily manuscript poet becomes in his own lifetime a public figure *as a poet*; nor to the ways in which poems originally intended for a gathering of close friends get published in the papers, where they sit alongside poems which are addressed to Swift by complete strangers and anonymous admirers.⁵⁶

We will never be able to compile a definitive list of the birthday poems, given the incomplete and erratic survival rates of early eighteenth-century Dublin newspapers, and the certain loss of manuscript poems. But such is the nature of ephemeral work: what remains is only a fragment. Even so, the birthday-poem tradition that survives is a substantial one. Swift’s poem in response to the birthday poems of Orrery and Delany, in which he hopes to be remembered reflected through their eyes and feelings as much as through his writings, finds a striking echo in W. B. Yeats’s poem “The Municipal Gallery Revisited” (1937), which ends with Yeats’s prayer to be remembered for his friendships, rather than for his poetry.⁵⁷ The recurrence might act as a rebuke to an easy response that such poems as Swift’s and Yeats’s are disingenuous or, even, ludicrous. And the rebuke would claim that the sentiment may well have had an emotional truth at the moment of its utterance, whatever posterity might say.

So much for the realm of the private, of friendship and alliance. But the birthday poems had public dimensions, too. Swift’s triumph over the sycophancy of the court odes came not

⁵⁴ See Dunkin’s letter to Martha Whiteway of 30 November 1736, (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, IV, 364-65), in which he apologized for the weakness of his poem, due to ill-health: “One comfort however I enjoy by absenting myself from your solemnity, that I shall not undergo a second mortification, by hearing my own stuff.”

⁵⁵ The most obvious example of an ‘in joke’ is the teasing associated with getting Esther Johnson’s age wrong in the Stella birthday poems. Compare the more ‘public’ joke of getting the Duke of Marlborough’s age wrong in *A Satirical Elegy on the Death of a Late Famous General* (*Poems*, ed. Williams, I, 296-97, l. 11). Marlborough was in fact 72.

⁵⁶ If we divide the birthday poems into poems ‘private’ and ‘public’ in tenor, it is not the case that the first remain in manuscript; see, for example, John Sican’s poem.

⁵⁷ *Yeats’s Poems*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares, 3rd ed. (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1996 [1989]), pp. 438-40, 629-31.

only with the posthumous publication of satirical poems such as “Directions for a Birth-day Song,” but with the outpouring of tributes which he inspired and which climaxed each year on the date of his birthday. In 1736, Pope wrote to Swift in response to reading newspaper reports of the Dublin birthday celebrations:

A whole People will rejoyce at every year that shall be added to you, of which you have had a late instance in the publick rejoycings on your birth-day. I can assure you, something better and greater than high birth and quality, must go toward acquiring those demonstrations of publick esteem and love. I have seen a royal birth-day uncelebrated, but by one vile Ode, and one hired bonfire. Whatever years may take away from you, they will not take away the general esteem, for your Sense, Virtue, and Charity.⁵⁸

Even if we think that Pope’s letter makes claims for Swift that are over-stated or politely exaggerated, the evidence of the birthday poems appears to support him. Certainly, the arrival of birthday celebrations of such magnitude and publicity, in honour of a figure who was neither royal nor wealthy, neither politically powerful nor particularly influential, heralds a cultural shift in how birthdays would come to be understood.

Birthday Poems Addressed to Swift

1713 Thomas Parnell, “Dr. Parnel to Dr. Swift, on his Birthday, November 30th, 1713;” printed in *The Works, in Verse and Prose, of Dr Thomas Parnell* (Glasgow, 1755) (“Urg’d by the warmth of Friendship’s sacred flame”).

1718-1722 Patrick Delany, Untitled Verses to Dean Swift on his Birthday; printed in Delany’s *Observations* (1754) (“How long with faith, shall every virtue fail?”).

1721 or 1722 Esther Johnson, “To Dr Swift on his Birth-Day, November 30, 1722;” printed in Deane Swift, *Essay* (1755) (“St Patrick’s dean, your country’s pride”).

⁵⁸ Pope to Swift 30 December 1736, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, IV, 379. This letter was printed in *The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq; Vol. VII* (London: T. Cooper, 1741), pp. 211-12, and in other copies of the Pope-Swift correspondence published that year by Cooper and by Curll.

1725 [Thomas Sheridan?] *A Poem Delivered to the Reverend Doctor Swift, Dean of St Patrick's, Dublin. By a Young Nobleman, November 30, 1725, Being the Dean's Birthday* (Dublin, 1725) ("In Sixteen Hundred Sixty Eight").

A Poem on the Drapier's Birth-Day. Being November the 30th (Dublin, 1725) ("O born by heaven's providential care").

1726 *A Poem on the Dean of St Patrick's Birth-Day, Nov 30th, Being St Andrew's Day* (Dublin, 1726) ("Between the hours of twelve and one").

Mary Barber, "On Sending my Son, as a Present, to Dr Swift, Dean of St Patrick's, on his Birth-Day;" printed in *Poems on Several Occasions* (1735) ("A Curious Statue, we are told").

1727 Charles Ford, "Ad Celerem. Die natali Nov. 30 1727;" printed in Nichol Smith (1935) ("Quo te salutem nomine idoneo?").

c.1729 Laetitia Pilkington, "To the Rev Dr Swift. On his Birth-day;" printed in *Memoirs* (1748) ("While I the God-like Men of Old").

1732 *To the Reverend Doctor Swift, Dean of St Patrick's. With a Present of Paper Finely Bound, on his Birth-Day November 30 1732* (Dublin: Faulkner, 1733). Contains the following three poems:

Earl of Orrery, "To the Reverend Doctor Swift ... With a Present of a Paper-Book" ("To thee, dear Swift, these spotless Leaves I send"); printed in *The Dublin Evening Post* (2 January 1733); also *The Gentleman's Magazine* (January 1733).

Patrick Delany, "Verses Left with a Silver Standish, on the Dean of St Patrick's Desk, on his Birthday" ("Hither from *Mexico* I came"); printed in *The Dublin Evening Post* (6 January 1733); also *The Gentleman's Magazine* (January 1733).

Laetitia Pilkington, "Sent with a Quill to the Dean of St Patrick's, upon Hearing he had Received a Present of Ink and Paper" ("Shall then my Kindred all my Glory claim"); printed in *The Dublin Evening Post* (16 January 1733).

1734 John Sican, "A Poem Sent to the Rev. Dr Swift, on his Birth-Day, with Pine's Horace, in Turkey Leather, Very Finely Bound and Gilt;" printed in *The London Magazine*, 3 (December 1734) and *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 4 (December 1734) ("You've read, sir, in poetic strain").

1736 [Thomas Sheridan], ‘To the Rev Doctor Swift, Dean of St Patrick’s. A Birthday Poem;’ printed in *The Dublin Journal* (30 November 1736) and reprinted in *The London Magazine*, 5 (December 1736) (“To you, my true, and faithful friend”).

“Verses sent to the Rev. Dr Swift, D.S.P.D. on the Anniversary of his Birth, Nov. 30, 1736, with one of Wood’s Copper Half-Pence Inclosed,” in *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, 6 (December 1736) (“The birth of kings be sung in venal strain”).

William Dunkin, “D – n to S – t;” printed in *Select Poetical Works* (Dublin, 1769) (“Most dear to thy D --- N, O S --- T, ever dear”).

1737 [Thomas Sheridan], “A Birthday Poem on the Anniversary of the Birth of the Rev. Dr Swift;” printed in *The Dublin Journal* (17 December 1737) (“This Day, the Fav’rite of the Year”).

1738 [William Dunkin] “Anniversary Verses on the Birth-Day of the Revd Dr SWIFT, D.S.P.D. 1738” printed in *The Dublin Journal* (5 Dec 1738); later re-printed in Dunkin’s *Select poetical works* (Dublin, 1769), with the omission of the last 6-line verse paragraph, wishing Swift long life and good health.

1740 “An Ode to the Patron of Liberty: On his Birth-Day. November 30, 1740;” printed in *The Dublin Journal* (6 December 1740) (“To the Wars, to the Wars, come along”).

“On the Same,” printed also in *The Dublin Journal* (6 December 1740) (“As Comus sat in merry guise”).

1741 Mr Marshall, “Ode, on the Dean’s Birth-Day,” in *The Dublin Journal* (1 December 1741) (“Arise, thou great Asserter of fair Liberty!”).

“Carmen R.D.D.J.S.D.P.D. Die nativitatis dedicatum a Michaelae Cullin,” in *The Dublin Journal* (1 December 1741) (“Me podeat siluisse die, quo pensa Sorores”).

D[eane] S[wift] Esq; “The Former Part of Homer’s Hymn to Apollo, Addressed to the Revd Dr J. Swift, D.S.P.D. On his Birth-Day, Nov 30, 1741” in *The Dublin Journal* (5 December 1741) (“Never let the Muse forget to sing the Praise”).

[William Dunkin], “On the Dean’s Birth-Day, Nov 30, 1741,” in *The Dublin Journal* (5 December 1741) (“The Saints, to testify their love”).

John Winstanley, “On Saint Andrew’s Day, and the Dean’s Birth-Day,” in *Poems Written Occasionally by John Winstanley* (Dublin, 1742), p. 67.

Undated poems

William Dunkin – a further two poems, their composition undated, printed in *Select Poetical Works* (Dublin, 1769):

“A Dialogue between Janus and Time, on the Dean’s Birth-Day” (“All seeing Janus, tell, since you”).

“An other on the Same” (“Ere meek Aurora, rob’d in white”).